

TESSA McBRIDE

Interviewed by: Jewell Fenzi Initial interview date: July 11, 2008

Q: This is Jewell Fenzi on Friday, July 11, 2008. I am interviewing Tessa McBride for the AAFSW Spouse Oral History Program, and we are recording this interview at the Woman's National Democratic Club. The first question I always ask someone is where did you meet your husband.

McBRIDE: I met him here in Washington; I was teaching school in Charlottesville. I just came for a year, and then stayed on. The first summer vacation, I toured around the States with a friend. And the second summer, which was basically three months, June, July, and August, I thought it would be interesting to come to Washington. One of my former colleagues at the school where I'd taught had become a State Department interpreter and lived in D.C.

Q: The school here, or in England?

McBRIDE: In Charlottesville, where I taught for 3 years in the end. So my friend was going to be working for the State Department that summer, taking international visitors round the country, which meant that I could sublet her apartment in Georgetown. She was dating another interpreter, who, in turn, was sharing an apartment with Ed. [laughter] So that's how we met!

Q: And then, how did you come over to Charlottesville? Was that on some program, or did you come on your own?

McBRIDE: On my own. My father was an army officer, but he spent the whole war in prison camp. He was captured at Dunkirk. As a result, his health wasn't very good after the war, so he basically had a desk job in London. However, I was sent to a boarding-school for army officers' daughters, and all my friends went - at that time, still the days of empire, more or less - so they went literally all over the world, and I was determined as soon as I graduated I would start traveling. I must admit I've done even better than I thought! [laughter]

Q: Surpassed expectations! [laughter]

McBRIDE: Absolutely. Ed was not a foreign service officer when we got married.

Q: So you didn't know what you were getting into.

McBRIDE: No.

Q: And how long did it take him to decide to go, what, with USIS, wasn't it?

McBRIDE: Yes. He was working for USIA. He was working in the exhibits division; I can't remember the details, but a lot of the programs in which he was going to be most interested were going to be transferred to either The Smithsonian or the International Visitors Program, which meant that if he wanted to continue with exhibits, it would be more interesting for him to be working overseas. Since he had passed, sometime earlier, the written foreign service exam, he went ahead and did the rest of it, which, as far as I know, basically meant going for an interview. I didn't know anything about the fact that he'd reapplied, but for a brief period, during the Vietnam War, they interviewed spouses as well as prospective foreign service officers. Or perhaps it was just foreign-born spouses. Anyway, I had to go for an interview with him, I think, really, to make sure I wasn't going to get out and demonstrate against the war [laughter], which people were doing at this point. And the interview was actually a dreadful experience, because they were interviewing both of us, and one of the things they asked was - I can still remember - what event of literary importance occurred in 1862, or 1863.

Q: Here in the United States, or internationally?

McBRIDE: Here in the United States. And Ed didn't know the answer; I was dying to fill in with bright chat, but that was not appropriate. It turns out that whatever the date was, during or just before the Civil War, it was Walt Whitman's publication of *Leaves of Grass*. And, fortunately, Ed redeemed himself by immediately quoting from *Leaves of Grass*. Anyway, he passed the interview, obviously. So did I.

Q: Now, I would have said - except I don't know when it was written - *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

McBRIDE: Exactly. And I can't remember now The trouble is I can't remember the date the interviewers gave. Obviously it was the 1860s, but Ed did say something like "it wasn't *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," which miraculously he knew the date of.

Q: Well, I'll have to read *Leaves of Grass*. Was this when Walt Whitman was Well, yes, he was a nurse. He was a Civil War nurse. That must have had something to do Oh, dear.

McBRIDE: I'm afraid I know very little about Leaves of Grass. I have read it, but I think the date must have been the late 1860s, because it was after Lincoln's assassination. Because "O Captain, my Captain, our fearful trip is done," is in it. It doesn't seem frightfully important. [laughter]

Q: So, you were married here, or in London?

McBRIDE: We were married in England, near London.

Q: And went where after that?

McBRIDE: We came back here for a year because Ed hadn't applied to the foreign service. I returned to a job which I had taken at GW Medical School. Not teaching at all. We were then assigned to Lagos, which was fine; we were supposed to leave in August, I think. But I can still remember Ed phoning me at the medical school and saying, would you mind going to Paris instead?

Q: [laughter] An academic question.

McBRIDE: Well, not really, because we were full of enthusiasm and helping the world, as you know. However, I said, no, I didn't mind going to Paris. [laughter] So that was our first post. But I wasn't an American citizen. Actually, although Ed was meant to be there yesterday, so to speak, our departure was a bit held up because I had to take the oath of citizenship. But once that had been achieved, we went off to Paris. [pause]

Q: So, you had to be an American citizen before you could go overseas?

McBRIDE: That's right. So I took the oath of citizenship. We'd given up our apartment by that time-the timing was that tight. We were living in an apartment that we were subletting from a friend on Capitol Hill; I can still remember that basement apartment. The rats at night would run along inside the heat vents making the most thunderous noise, so I was quite glad to leave there and go to Paris _____. [laughter]

Q: And so what did you find in Paris? Where did you live, and what did you do?

McBRIDE: The first thing was to find an apartment; we had to find it on our own, which was true for USIA in most posts we went to, except for hardship posts. I had done French for university entrance, but my French was literary French, basically, and I didn't know things like "how is the electricity supplied?" or "where do we put our garbage?"

Q: And what year was that?

McBRIDE: We arrived in 1967. Our allowance was \$300 a month, or the equivalent in French francs, which seemed a fortune to us, but turned out, of course [laughter] Allowances are never overgenerous, but it was very hard to find an apartment for \$300. I would get up early each morning to buy the local paper and look at the ads, because if you didn't get there pretty quickly and say, yes, we want this apartment, you lost it. But anyway, after quite a search, we found a lovely apartment. A beautiful apartment, actually, in the Septi^eme, where we spent three wonderful years in Paris.

Q: What did you do there? How did you fill your hours?

Q: This was World War II.

McBRIDE: It was World War II, but some of them must, in fact, have been World War I widows. They had a pittance of a pension and were often living in small garret rooms and quite sort of isolated. So they wanted visitors who could help them in little ways. The person I visited most wanted, for instance, a warm dressing gown, which I brought her. Most of the members of Toc H were quite elderly, too-mostly my mother's generation rather than my own. But it was just an interesting group of people to get to know.

Q: Why was it called Toc H?

McBRIDE: Isn't it awful? I don't know! I can't remember! [laughter] The symbol was a little sort of night lamp. It had been started at some point before World War II by a British man, who was very closely affiliated with the Anglican church. I think his first name, it must have been his nickname, was Bunty something, but I've forgotten the details of the organization. [laughter]

Q: Maybe we can Google it and find out a little about it.

Q: He was the control officer.

Q: So, what did you do with your car?

McBRIDE: Oh, the car! We bravely parked on the street, but we were not in the Latin Quarter and so that made it less risky. And the car was fine. [laughter] We occasionally used it, but obviously, we didn't take it anywhere near a riot.

Q: So, it was really localized disturbance. It wasn't

McBRIDE: Yes, but it affected the whole city for all the reasons that

Q: But you could still move around, but you were careful where you went.

Q: Oh, of course you did! Now, at that time, it didn't help being so close to England that you could have gone home? You didn't want to?

McBRIDE: No, because actually, it was all quite sudden. I'd been told I had to be careful, and I'd been extremely anxious to be pregnant. I went to the doctor one day. He was a very fierce doctor, a brilliant doctor, but none of the sort of pleasant charm that one associated with American gynecologists or obstetricians at the time. And my French doctor said, "You must go home. You must go straight to bed. You mustn't leave the apartment. You're just to stay in the apartment, and you're to do this now!" [laughter]

Q: For three months.

McBRIDE: This was at six months. I was very cross, because the next day we'd been invited to go to Versailles by the deputy director, to have a private tour before it was open to the public. We were going with a friend who was an opera singer, who had, I think, arranged that we would have this special tour. I can't remember whether she was coming, too. But at any rate, we would literally have been able to bounce on the beds and not subject to any of the normal limitations.

Q: Oh, wonderful!

McBRIDE: They'll open drawers for you, and let you see and touch anything you want. So, I wailed to Dr. Bazin, "but can't I go to Versailles tomorrow!?" [laughter] And he said, "Certainly not!" So, I missed that. I missed a lot. But for the last couple of weeks before the nine months, he said it was fine to go out. So I took advantage of absolutely every opportunity.

Q: Why the change?

McBRIDE: Well, because if she'd been born at six months, she'd have been too small, but by eight-and-a-half months it was fine. And, in fact, she was nine pounds, two ounces, when she was born. So that was all right.

Q: So, a very healthy baby. But those must have been three difficult months. You must have read a lot.

McBRIDE: I read a lot. Sometimes, friends came to visit. I pottered around the apartment a lot. When I was a small girl, I spent a lot of time being taught to sew and embroider very beautifully, which actually hasn't been all that practical. But at that time, I was still doing embroidery and sewing and so on. For example, I made my own maternity dresses and things. So when confined to the apartment, I made some crib hangings, and some maternity dresses, and knitted baby clothes, as well. No television. I just remember being rather frustrated and cross, but obviously not wanting to have the baby too early.

Q: This is before the 1970's directive. Was USIS making any demands on you as a spouse? Yes, and no? [laughter]

McBRIDE: OH Yes! The PAO's wife was a fabulous woman, whom we still see occasionally, called Mary Brady. And Mary Brady is great fun, but was able to call on us from time to time. But she could laugh about some of the things we were called upon to do. And I don't think it was always Mary who was asking us to do them. There were three ambassadors while we were there. We began with Ambassador Bohlen, and that was very much old-fashioned foreign service. . . . I feel very fortunate, in a way, to have seen the old foreign service as it soon ceased to exist. However, under the Bohlens, if you were invited to an event at the embassy, you had to arrive, I think, twenty minutes beforehand, not a minute earlier, not a minute later. And Mary had written to me and said I must bring a hat to make my calls. Well, we had no money.... the main reason we had absolutely no money was that we had put all our savings into the down-payment on a house. It was so irresponsible, in a way - when we bought the house, if they had asked us for another twenty-cent stamp more, we'd have had to say no! [laughter] We sold everything. We sold the car. We sold my hairpiece. We sold everything we could! [laughter]

Q: Is that the house you're living in now?

McBRIDE: No, we've moved once since. [laughter] However, I'm a believer in large hats that make a statement if you have to wear one. When we had to buy this damned hat, Ed had allowed me twenty dollars to buy it, but I've got a big head, which was a problem, too. Eventually, I had to buy a hat at Lord and Taylor's, more expensive than some of the little hat shops that then existed down at F and G Streets. I didn't want him to know I'd gone over the twenty-dollar limit. So, in the end, I remember writing a check for twenty dollars, and then paying the rest in cash, which must have looked very odd! [laughter] So, we arrived in Paris, and Mary asked me if I'd brought a hat. And I said, "oh, yes, I quite like the hat." And she said, "but it doesn't have a brim, does it! [laughter] You're not allowed to wear a hat without a brim to call on Mrs. Bohlen!" [laughter]

Q: Oh, no!

McBRIDE: So I was very cross, but fortunately, my mother either sent me a hat, or I somehow borrowed one. People wore hats all the time in England. They still wear them much more than here. And my mother also had a big head, so she lent me a hat to make this call. Section heads arranged for new arrivals to go to the Residence - lots of us were there because the embassy was so large - and section heads arranged for each wife in turn, to sit on the sofa to talk to Mrs. Bohlen. You were instructed ahead of time which side of Mrs. Bohlen you had to sit on - it was either the left or the right - and it was a big no-no if you sat on the wrong side. So Mary shepherded me to the correct side and I talked to Mrs. Bohlen for a little while. I don't know what about. She was very pleasant, and I wondered afterwards: Was this a mystique that was built around people like the Bohlens, or did they really want all these rules followed? Anyway, so you had to make the call. And you had to have a big supply of engraved calling cards. And there was a special way that you had to put your husband's card and the Mr. and Mrs. cards, which had to be left not only on Mrs. Bohlen, but on all the section chiefs' wives, as well; but fortunately, you didn't have to go and call on them. You did everything with the call on Mrs. Bohlen at the residence. All the section chiefs' wives were very pleasant and lively. I clearly remember some of their comments. A lot of them have, sadly, since died, but they were basically fun. And Mary is huge fun.

Q: But this was the late 1960s, after the cultural revolution here, and everything. So your section (heads?) must have been rather young people, in their forties, or so?

Q: It probably was written somewhere in the protocol of the embassy, and Mrs. Bohlen, of course, was Mrs. Foreign Service to any number of people. I knew her here in Washington, briefly, as a very young spouse, and she was charming. She was very nice to us. Now, of course, we weren't in an embassy situation. We were in the AAFSW. She was around when that was founded, and, you know, supported it. But she very much was old school, definitely.

McBRIDE: The only other people that - I didn't know them at all but much later on, about thirty years later on, when we were assigned to London, we met Mrs. Bruce, who was apparently the same. Mrs. Bruce, who had retired - I think she lived in England full-time Anyway, when I met her, she was sitting on a cushion [laughter] at some country fair, surrounded by vegetables, which she was selling for some worthy cause [laughter]. I.e. no longer Mrs. Foreign Service

Q: This was Evangeline Bruce?

McBRIDE: Yes. [laughter]

Q: She was a breath of fresh air. She really was.

McBRIDE: And she was charming. And we went off to lunch with her, for some reason. We must have been with friends who knew her. And I thought, well goodness! I wonder whether she was like Mrs. Bohlen as an ambassador's wife! And Mrs. Bohlen seemed absolutely charming in my encounter with her, mainly on the sofa, for my call.

Q: Someone like the Shrivvers could come in, and they could throw all of that over because of who they were.

McBRIDE: Oh, but it was shocking! The French were still - I think still are - more formal than the Americans; and, of course, they were used to the Bohlens' regime. The Shrivvers also wanted to invite a totally different group of people, in particular, young people. And I think anybody under - I think the cutoff age must have been under forty - At any rate, Ed was supposed to supply a list on, I think, a quarterly basis of all the people he had met under a certain age, and could actually call up and chat with. They had to be under thirty-five or under forty or something.

Q: Another set of rules! [laughter]

Q: Is Ed there? [laughter] Yes sir! [laughter] Is Ed there?

McBRIDE: Ed got out of the tub. [laughter]

Q: Indeed. Indeed.

McBRIDE: But, obviously, we were lucky to attend a lot of these events (?). . . . By this time I was pregnant again. We were clever enough to have two babies in fifty-four weeks, but this was fine. But this time I went to everything, and the Shrivvers were so considerate. They had a reception after the midnight mass - and we had to go to the reception, although I think I, in view of my condition, I could have opted out. But I didn't particularly want to, so we were up until about three, but, of course, that was three in the morning of Christmas Day, and we wanted to visit my mother in England. My mother was a widow and lived on her own. So, the Shrivvers said, "oh, we'll send our car and driver to collect you and then you can go straight to the airport." So we had this astonishing sort of presidential-type limousine to go to the airport, with the first baby, our daughter Sarah. We rather ruined the image as we swept up to the airport when I sort of stumbled out with a huge bag of disposable nappies, or something, which I dropped. [laughter] But the Shrivvers were enormously thoughtful. When Charlotte, our second daughter, was born, they wrote and congratulated us, which they did for all new parents. Although you had to be available, or Ed had to be available literally twenty-four hours a day, they were very considerate and very grateful and thanked you. And Eunice is a fabulous woman. She was very much in touch with most of the embassy wives. If there was any crisis, she would be amongst the first to go and try to do anything she could to help. They were in many ways, amongst the most considerate ambassadors that we've ever served under.

Q: Interesting.

McBRIDE: But the third ambassador was a complete contrast again. I don't know if the Shrivvers actually encouraged (?) this, but anyway, Ed started growing his hair quite long, not down to the shoulders, or anything. But then Ambassador Watson arrived. By this time we knew we were going to go to Senegal Ambassador Watson's first directive was that everybody had to have short hair - men had to have their hair above their collars and they must all have proper haircuts. Well, this hadn't been the Shrivvers' style at all. Ed said, "I'm not going to cut my hair. I just won't do it." [laughter] He's very difficult to shift once he's made up his mind about something.

Q: How close to the end of your French tour were you then?

McBRIDE: This must have been about three months before we left. So anyway, Ed never did cut his hair, but then it was collar and tie, and there was some directive about the kind of shirt that the men were supposed to wear, white I think. I keep saying men, because there weren't many female foreign service then.

Q: Who was Mr. Watson?

McBRIDE: He was the director of IBM. He got into trouble, I think, during his assignment to Paris. I think he was groping the air hostesses on the plane, or something. I can't remember. This may be entire gossip. There was some sort of scandal, but obviously, long after we left. Paris was astonishing because of the cultural experiences and the people we met. We knew the Menuhins pretty well. And Ed knew Leontyne Price pretty well. We never had another post like that. His last overseas post was London, but by that time there just wasn't this enormous interest in American cultural events. And anyway, there was almost no budget for it.

Q: I was just going to say money.

McBRIDE: Oh, one extraordinary event in was that President Nixon, during the Shrivvers' time - this was part of this historical event - came to Paris to meet with President de Gaulle, and that was astonishing on many different levels. One thing involved Mrs. Shriver, who is a delightful person, but a formidable character. She's charming and kind, but I probably wouldn't want to get into an argument with her. An advance team came. When you went into the residence, one of the rooms was a big sort of entrance hall; and, I think, to the right - I can't remember exactly - there was a big grand piano. On the piano were photos of her family, which, of course, included lots of Kennedy photos, including her late brother (John Kennedy). I think this must have been before Robert Kennedy was assassinated. Anyway, they must have been quite newly arrived. I can't remember the date. The advance team said, all the photos must go! [laughter] Again, can President Nixon have been aware of this? But the photos went! She took them all away. Ed had got the Menuhins to come because Yehudi Menuhin at the time was an American citizen. I believe later, in order to receive a knighthood in the U.K., he may have renounced his citizenship. I don't know what happened. Anyway, he was definitely an American citizen, which was news, in fact, to anyone British, because he'd lived in England for years. So I didn't know he was American. [laughter] Anyway he came, and he liked to have as accompanist, his sister, Hephzibah Menuhin, who was both American and married to an American; they played together fabulously. But Hephzibah would arrive quite late - we later learned, I suppose because we went to other performances. . . She regarded her main work as helping her husband with the settlement program that he ran in the Chicago area. So, being Yehudi's accompanist was, to Hephzibah, just not the most important thing in her life. But the thing that was very, very lucky for Ed, but totally unknown to him at first, was that during World War II, the Menuhins had been the first people to give a concert, a benefit concert, for the Free French, in London. So, after they finished playing, de Gaulle got up and gave Menuhin this great big bear hug, and said, "mon ami!" [laughter] So, the Nixons and de Gaulle seemed to get along very well. Once again, the protocol for an embassy wife, surrounding all this, was absolutely amazing.

Q: Did Pat Nixon come, too?

McBRIDE: Yes, she did-at least, I think she did. But I can just remember the President de Gaulle giving Menuhin this great big hug. And this was one of the occasions when there was no rolling of the salvers by the Shriver children. [laughter]

Q: No way! [laughter]

McBRIDE: And everything was very, very formal. So, anyway, from there Is this the order that you'd like to do it?

Q: Yes. Well, I think we think that way in our foreign service careers. You know, from Paris you went to Senegal. Yes. Or however. Just fine.

McBRIDE: Well, then we went to Senegal.

Q: But let me just ask you. You never really felt that the embassy made any undue demands on you.

McBRIDE: Yes, there was all the business of going to things you were supposed to go to, but there were also mainly cookery demands. One of the things At some point the budget was very low for USIS and they were supposed to give a great big party for something. It was in the cultural center. And Mary said, "We don't have enough money to supply booze. We're going to make this punch." They were expecting several hundred people, a very large number of people. And we mixed up the punch in great big vats and it was horrid, actually, because there was some fruit base.

Q: Did it have alcohol in the punch?

McBRIDE: It had some alcohol in the punch. It must have had. I can't remember what went into it, but I remember feeling how terribly sticky I felt. [laughter] I think it must have had some cut-up fruit in it, too but, it wasn't nearly as strong as sangria. We made barrels, barrels of this stuff! [laughter] It must have taken several hours. Then the reception came and people drank hardly any of it. [laughter] There were masses left over. [laughter]. So that was one cookery demand, and then

Q: Did they freeze it for another time, or did they toss it?

McBRIDE: I'm afraid I don't know what happened to it. Everybody was given several bottles of it, and we brought several bottles home. I don't know what we did with it. I expect we drank some of it, because I'm a sort of "waste not" person. [laughter]

Q: She sounds like a person that you all didn't mind working for.

McBRIDE: Oh, no.

Q: She got in and rolled up her sleeves and worked with you. Right?

McBRIDE: Absolutely.

Q: And she was on good terms with all of you, too.

McBRIDE: Yes. Anyway, for another occasion somebody decided that This must have actually have come from the ambassador's office, although, once again, I doubt if it came from Eunice Shriver, or if it did, I am sure she didn't realize how much work it was! [laughter] It was a party for George Washington's birthday, I think. Anyway, it was something to do with an anniversary of George Washington. The decision was that what would be served would be things that George Washington himself might have served at Mt. Vernon. So, everybody was left on their own to do this, which seemed so odd. I was asked to bring two kinds of cookies, or maybe I decided to bring those. Anyway, sweet things that Washington might have served. I found one recipe that was a contemporary recipe of Washington's. Then I cheated for the second kind: I found another one that was sort of mid-nineteenth century and I thought "oh, what the hell, nobody will notice." [laughter] So I made these perfectly terrible cookies that were Martha Washington's cookies, apparently. There was some problem with yeast or the flour they used, so the cookies were like lead! [laughter] But the punch! Ed found a Mount Vernon recipe for the punch, and the punch was absolutely the most alcoholic thing I think I have ever drunk. The food didn't go down that well, but the drink went down very well. Of course, at the time, one literally didn't know about not smoking and drinking and so on if you were pregnant. I didn't smoke anyway. But I remember thinking this is the strongest, most delicious punch I have ever had in my life, and I probably had several glasses of it. They gave us all the leftovers to take home, and Ed said, "Never mind, we'll make trifle with your cookies." Well, the cookies sat in the punch without absorbing the liquid [laughter] they just sat there! Anyway, we were asked to do things like that, and I've only described the most amusing ones. But, as you say, one didn't mind. And also at the time, wives weren't allowed to work, so one wasn't trying to juggle the schedule. As you'll have gathered, I had quite a lot of other activities, and I carried on with the research even though I didn't go on to the Sorbonne.

Q: Demographic research.

McBRIDE: Yes.

Q: Did you ever do anything with that?

McBRIDE: Well, yes. Much later on I came back here and embarked on a Ph.D. at the University of Maryland. But just when I got to the stage where I was to start writing my thesis, Ed was assigned to Bucharest, and it seemed more important to learn Romanian than to do the research. And I never got my doctorate.

Q: So the Ph.D.'s out there waiting.

McBRIDE: Yes, and now I don't mind any more. I think this is a big problem for the foreign service in that then - much less so now - but at the time people were far more interested in who the foreign service officer was, generally, of course, a man, and they weren't interested in a wife at all. Literally, at one point, a hostess at my own home in Belgrade, somebody said to me, "It's not you I want to talk to. It's your husband." [laughter]

Q: How gracious!

McBRIDE: So, at the time, I wanted to prove I had a brain, but now, anyway, my brain's getting worse and worse. [laughter] Now it doesn't matter any more! [laughter]

Q: It's not a question of your brain. It's a question of the time in your life. Is it worthwhile going back to do that sort of thing now, don't you think?

McBRIDE: Yes, yes. Partly, through Evermay, I can pursue topics that interest me, and they broaden enormously beyond historical demography, which I actually still think is fascinating. But it's too late now.

Q: What would you have done with that as a career?

McBRIDE: At the time that I was really actively pursuing the Ph.D., I think I consoled myself when it became clear that it was Romania or the Ph.D., that options were limited. Oh, and the other thing was that it would have meant was my staying at least another six months here, with the rest of the family scattered, basically. It would have been very difficult for our son, who was about eight years old, and so on and so forth. Ed would have gone to Romania on his own, and how would I have managed son Edward, and all these things. But, realistically, the only thing I could have done with a Ph.D. in historical demography, probably, was to teach at university level as a lecturer. And I would have enjoyed that, but if Ed was going to Romania, he would probably have another assignment after that, and that would mean eight years away, because they were normally four-year assignments.

Q: A long time.

McBRIDE: So the whole thing just wasn't going to work.

Q: Was that the days before separate maintenance?

McBRIDE: This was '82. I can't remember if they already had separate maintenance.

Q: Probably did.

McBRIDE: I think they did, as well.

Q: But still. The disruption, the family disruption.

McBRIDE: I wasn't that interested in going to Romania, which actually turned out to be our most interesting post, but I guess I just didn't like the idea of sending him off on his own.

Q: Oh, no. And you had other priorities at the time, too, so Romania didn't seem to be very high, understandably very high. [laughter] But to get that close to a Ph.D. It must have been a little upsetting at the time.

McBRIDE: It was upsetting, but I was. . . . Of course, finances are always a bigger problem in Washington than overseas, and my mother had died. It had been a four-year assignment here, and my mother had died of an accident about eighteen months into the assignment. And, of course, that was in London, and I had to deal with her house, and so on and so forth. And I was just at that point doing the qualifying courses to even allow me to start on the program. I was teaching for Montgomery County, which meant doing other courses [text obscured by laughter], and we had three young children. And the exhaustion of the "up-until-two-o'clock-in-the-morning", and getting up again at eight. So, in a way, all this was going to get much easier, but it was important for me to be teaching, even though it was just substitution at-home instruction, in order to have a little extra money to spend on this and that. So I remember being upset in one way, but just not prepared to deal with the whole business of staying here on my own and trying to keep everything going. I just remember reaching a decision after a couple of weeks, and thinking it would really be better if I went to Romania.

Q: That is a decision that so many people made. And now, the women oftentimes are making it the other way and staying here, out of economic necessity. We just had a talk about that yesterday here.

McBRIDE: Because I didn't have The Ph. D was serious work, but I planned to return to teaching. Oh, this was the other thing. I knew I could probably get a job in Bucharest. And although the salary in Bucharest was going to be much, much lower, it was a long time since I'd taught full-time, so that was another factor.

Q: So you did go right to work in Bucharest.

McBRIDE: Yes, I began teaching at the American School of Bucharest. I think overseas employment is a huge problem, but also I imagine it happens less now. But at first, people were so critical of wives who either worked full-time, or wanted to work full-time. Particularly, when you're confronted with children's college, it is an economic necessity, if you want your children to have the same level of education, and probably the professional life that you've enjoyed. It's not a matter of choice. So I felt irritated when people would criticize.

Q: Well, I know, that's true. I think part of that was that the people who weren't working were still in the pre-1972 mode. A lot really didn't change, when you come right down to it. And I think the people who weren't working resented the fact that they were baking the cookies while you were off teaching, or something. I really do feel that was a part of it.

McBRIDE: There were so many resentments, in a way, created by 1972, even though, in general, I think it was for the good. The resentments were most apparent in Bucharest.

Q: What year was that?

McBRIDE: In 1982 we went to Bucharest.

Q: Dakar was after France, so that was what? 1970 to '73. And Paris was

McBRIDE: Sixty-seven to '70.

Q: And then Belgrade?

McBRIDE: Seventy-four to '78.

Q: And then Washington. Right? For four years?

McBRIDE: That's right.

Q: And then Bucharest, '82 to '85. And then Prague.

McBRIDE: Six months.

Q: Madrid.

McBRIDE: Eighty-six to '90.

Q: And then the U.K.

McBRIDE: Yes, with another about eight-month period when Wait, I've done this wrong. Sorry. It was Budapest after Bucharest, Romania. Budapest, four months. Madrid, and then Prague for six months

Q: Then how did those short assignments You didn't move household and everything, did you? For six months?

McBRIDE: Oh no [laughter] From Bucharest, Ed had no assignment. He was also pretty sick. Well, not sick, but he'd broken a disc in his back.

Q: So, you must have come home on leave and then went to

Q: It probably still is today. [laughter]

McBRIDE: We went there right before we left. We must also have gone very soon after our arrival, because Ed was in some way responsible for The Gambia. We went again right before our departure, because I wanted to return; and I was staggered, because in that time, so many hotels and things had been built. We made lots of very good friends in Dakar. People were responsible for creating their own fun. Unexpected things happened. There were really only two grocery stores to shop in, and all Westerners had an account there. You never paid money. People had very little money around because of the risk of theft. The exception was that, on the last day of the month, everybody would cash a check, or whatever you did to get money from the embassy, and then we all would go to this place called the Ranch Filfili and pay the bill. Which meant, of course, that people had much more money than usual in the house on whatever it was, the last Saturday, or the last day of the month. Our house had tiled floors everywhere, and I was often up in the middle of the night, either for one of the children, or just because I needed the lavatory. So one night I was up more than usual - twice - and not for the children. Just because something woke me up and then I went to the loo. And I realized afterwards that, in fact, one of those times, there must have been a thief in the room with me. But fortunately, I didn't realize this. The next morning, when we went downstairs to breakfast We had a Senegalese servant, euphemistically called a houseboy, but it's quite a strictly Muslim country, and he would not come upstairs; and we had a female who was responsible for the upstairs and who helped with the children. The houseboy hadn't got breakfast, or anything. He was sitting glumly in the middle of the kitchen, staring at my jewelry, which was scattered all over the floor. It turned out, of course, that the thief had come up, and taken the money, which was on the bedside table, on Ed's side of the bed. He, the thief, had opened drawers enough to find my jewelry, take it downstairs, and go through it; but what he was looking for was Senegalese jewelry, because then the gold could be melted down; and mine was basically European pieces, so that happily he didn't want them. He didn't want my engagement ring either. So that was okay. But that was not really traumatic.

Q: You didn't have a guard at night?

McBRIDE: Oh, we had a guard, but the guard had fallen asleep.

Q: [laughter] I've had that happen, too.

Q: But that's so important. That's the most important thing.

McBRIDE: Yes, because if you're endlessly worried about someone's illness(?), you can't participate in anything. And although we, to a great extent, made our own entertainment - of course, once again, no videos, nothing like that in the early '70s - but there was a strong embassy community, and a strong international community. We made some wonderful friends, who are still friends. We would give crazy kind of parties, which involved not quite treasure hunts, but all sorts of

Q: Scavenger hunts.

McBRIDE: Scavenger hunts. Thank you. And the beach was a plus, because you could go to the beach. Very little cultural activity.

Q: It sounds very much like Freetown. Freetown was much the same way. You heavily depended on your friends. We did have Sierra Leonean friends because the women had been educated, in London, some of them. They'd gone up with their husbands, gone up to Sandhurst, where the military And they were not tribal people. They were descendants of the freed slaves. That was what Freetown was all about, of course. There was a huge cultural divide there, but there were educated women, and we spoke English, and they loved their gardens. It could have been worse.

Q: Oh, that sounds so like my husband, too. [laughter]

McBRIDE: We had this terrible time. And meanwhile, the plane was meant to have left, but it clearly hadn't left. So, I suppose Ed kicked up enough of a fuss that they finally said they'd let us on the plane. We had the pushchair for Charlotte, and I was carrying Sarah, and we thought we were about to miss the plane. There was quite an expanse of tarmac between the building and the plane, and Ed was carrying stuff, I don't know, the impedimenta you have with small children; and I remember running after him. He was first, and I was running after him, and poor Sarah was running behind. And, to this day - she's now in her thirties - she remembers that, and her terror because she thought she was going to be left behind. Anyway, so we got on the plane and found that the plane had lots of seats left, and didn't leave for ages, presumably because they were waiting for everybody's bribe.

Q: That is a typical West African story. [laughter]

McBRIDE: Then we were back here for ten months, for Ed to learn Serbo-Croatian. We moved into our house in Woodacres and had a very happy ten months. I was determined. . . . My only thing that I was determined about in the foreign service is that I wouldn't go anywhere without learning the language. Ed went to language school, I think at FSI, but I wasn't allowed to.

Q: And that was taking Serbo-Croatian.

McBRIDE: Yes. In the end, for about three months before going to Belgrade, I had tutoring. I'd been doing the tapes at home, and then had tutoring from a marvelous man, Mr. Popovich. I would go to his house. He was a formidable character, to the point that some people were scared of him, but he and I got along fine. He had fought on the royalist side in Yugoslavia during World War II, so I believe that's why he and the family were in the United States, where they'd been for a long time, and his English was very good. So I learned a lot about his experiences during the war, and so on. One thing happened in connection with being a foreign service wife. [laughter] It sounds as though I was pregnant all the time, which isn't true. But anyway, I had another baby right before we left, and Ed's PAO in Belgrade was a man called Terry Catherman, a very, very strong and somewhat formidable character. I'd never met Terry Catherman, and I had just given birth, never my best moment. And the phone rings, and Ed was on his way back from language training, and the caller explained that he was Terry Catherman, and I made all the right noises and said, could I give Ed a message? And he replied, "no, I'll just call back. It's nothing important. I want him to come to Belgrade before the fourth of July." [laughter] And I, completely taken aback, said, "Nothing important! I want you to know that at that stage my baby will be three weeks old. [laughter] I am just out of hospital. I've got to empty the house." I read him this whole long lecture of how I couldn't move then. [laughter] I would never have done this had I actually met Terry Catherman.

Q: He was just a voice on the other end. [laughter]

McBRIDE: So I told him all the reasons my husband couldn't be there by July the fourth, and Ed wasn't there by July the fourth, [laughter] I think because I'd been so insistent. Anyway, Terry Catherman turned out to be very nice, but if I'd met him, I don't think I'd have said all that. [laughter]

Q: You went from Belgrade to Bucharest to Romania to Budapest. How did he get into the eastern European

McBRIDE: He'd expressed interest in the area.

Q: Oh, he had. Oh, okay.

McBRIDE: So Belgrade: Tito was still alive, so it was still Yugoslavia. And it was still extraordinary difficult for wives to work, although I think that they could work.

Q: Because you had the '72 directive while you were in Belgrade. No, no, it's in Senegal; but it probably didn't make much difference in Senegal.

Q: That wouldn't sell on its own.

McBRIDE: Yes. And I never actually I would give it back to the butcher, because I don't know what to with a head of lamb, so I would always give it back. Anyway, it was made very clear to me that I didn't have to do anything about these parties. But the question then became, if Ed was going to give a party but was at the office all day, who would prepare for the party? [laughter]

Q: Right! Exactly!

Q: Which is a nice break, in a way.

McBRIDE: It was a wonderful break. I was thrilled to come back to the house. I was thrilled to be in America. I'm not good at moving, actually. It takes me ages to adjust and make friends and get used to it and stop complaining, and so on and so forth. And I imagine I did a share of that when I came back to the States, but it was different. [laughter]

Q: Because you knew it was going to be all right.

Q: We were always out of pocket for schools if we didn't send our children to the one that was available there, which was most of the time. McBRIDE: It's amazing. I thought it was particularly amazing that after this counselor said And, oh, we had the choice - we actually discussed - she said, either you should change posts - you know, there are grounds - but . . .

Q: [laughter] Easier said than done!

McBRIDE: Anyway, Ed would have had to start the bidding process all over again, and he already had, not a year, but six or eight months, or whatever it was, invested in learning Romanian; and, by this time, about another eight or nine months speaking Romanian. So anyway, we didn't cut short Romania.

Q: And Edward stayed in his school?

McBRIDE: No, we sent him to boarding school.

Q: No, but he stayed in the boarding school in England. He didn't move to another?

McBRIDE: The problem was, you see, that the English school thought he was scholarship material. We knew he was going to do the scholarship program, but it never occurred to us that he would actually win a scholarship to Eton. How do you say no to a scholarship to Eton?

Q: You can't. [laughter] You don't.

McBRIDE: But he later came to college here. However, I think there are two huge problems to this very day for the foreign service. One is the question of wives' employment, because whatever is said, and it does get a little better every year, many wives simply cannot transfer their careers from one country to another, so that wives in my generation, if they could get jobs at all, were content with having any job.

Q: Underemployment.

McBRIDE: That's what you would do, from post to post. You would get whatever work you could. But the other huge problem is education, because many of the schools in more out-of-the-way posts are excellent little schools - not all of them little, of course. In fact, often the smaller ones may be the best ones. But they're not going to be the ideal school for everybody, and if you have a child that needs a special program of one kind or another, the schools simply cannot provide them. I don't really know the way to solve either of these problems, but I certainly think more could and should be done. I mean, there must be more people who are traveling special education people, and so on, who could go from post to post. There must be more possibility of allowances, because . . .

Q: You know, I really don't know what it's like now. What it's like now is that a lot of wives aren't going along, because we have 700 unaccompanied positions.

Q: Yes, yes.

McBRIDE: But some American employees would get apoplectic with rage about this. And sometimes, if a person heard of an American who'd actually given somebody a piece of meat or a bag of sugar, they were absolutely horrified and said that the American government had paid to fly in this food (for Americans only) Absolutely true, but if you gave someone some food, you probably gave a tiny little bit towards improving their attitude towards the United States. So anyway, food was a major concern.

Q: How about your ability - I forget the man's name - to

McBRIDE: Oh, Ceausescu.

Q: Yes. Was he?

McBRIDE: Oh, it was during the worst excesses of Ceausescu.

Q: Were you free to move around?

McBRIDE: Yes, but we were followed. I mean, I don't know when we were followed. The car was bugged, like everything else. In one incident while we were there, somebody took their shoes to be repaired. We were all were taking our shoes to different local Romanian shops to be repaired. And then they discovered that a bug had been put in the heel of one of the shoes. [laughter] So then we weren't allowed to use local repairmen. And somebody would come and sweep the house for bugs occasionally. As far as I remember, they eventually decided not to bother since there were so many controls from the Romanian Securitate. But since this great moment of awakening in Yugoslavia [laughter], I didn't really care about being bugged.

Q: This is the first post where your children were all at school.

McBRIDE: After the first year, yes. Yes, but I was teaching at the American school, and that was an enormously rewarding experience. There were actually more non-Americans there than Americans.

Q: All the expatriate children.

Q: And then, did you go to England to see him?

McBRIDE: So I would go to England to see him. It was during that last year that there was a big freeze in Bucharest. As I've implied, we had a large house, but the heating of the house was by gas, and Romania had its coldest winter in a very long time, fifty or a hundred years. Everything froze, and the snow was piled high in the streets. Ceausescu was so determined to maintain a positive balance of payments that he ordered that the gas heat be turned off most of the time. So nobody, ourselves included, had heat in the house.

Q: Did you have fireplaces?

McBRIDE: We had one wood-burning fireplace, but the older rooms in this house had high, high ceilings, and it was large. Romanians were anyway only allowed to have one light bulb burning at any given time, so there was no heat and very little light. We were unlimited for electricity, so we could have on as many lights as we wanted. When the gas suddenly went off without warning, we, of course, were giving a dinner party that night [laughter]. I still remember the meal being half-cooked, and I can't remember how we solved the problem. Eventually, we fed everybody. And then, from that day on for about a couple of months, there was almost never any heat. All the radiators inside the house froze, and the one in the front hall actually burst, because of the freezing temperatures inside. A lot of people died.

Q: Romanians, not Americans.

McBRIDE: Romanians. Ceausescu ordered that no baby's birth could be registered until it was six months old. As ill luck would have it, nine months earlier he had ordered everyone to become pregnant. Women had to have three-monthly exams to check on this. So there were an exceptionally high number of births, and an awful lot of newborns died, but they never existed officially. The other problem was that ambulances, because of all the snow, couldn't get easily to people's homes, and there were so many calls on their time. One of Ed's cultural assistants died of a heart attack. She was only in her thirties, but the ambulance couldn't get to the house in time. And then people couldn't be buried, because the ground was frozen through.

Q: Terrible!

McBRIDE: So the bodies either - I didn't see this - the bodies were apparently stacked high. But at some point during all this I was scheduled to go to England, and so once I was there, Ed kept saying, don't come back. Actually, it was quite difficult, because I had no immediate relatives in England. Ed had sent all the USIA dependents away, if they could manage it, but the DCM felt that the American employees should show the Romanians how tough we were. [laughter]

Q: Who was that? [laughter] Naming no names! I can look it up. [laughter]

McBRIDE: He was a former Marine.

Q: Oh, imagine!

McBRIDE: But that being said, Romania was probably our most interesting post. It is extraordinary to have lived under really hard-line Communism, because people don't truly understand what it was like. I've mentioned that we explored the country, and our first two questions when we arrived in a hotel would be: what food do you have? And when is there going to be hot water?

Q: [laughter] In that order.

McBRIDE: Sometimes it was, never. And we would travel with cans of food, because one never knew what, if anything would be available. Our daughters were at school in England all the time that we were in Romania. It was very hard to leave them at the school in Ascot. It was a convent school, and when I was leaving, the nuns obviously realized that I was about to cry, so kindly hurried me on my way. So off I went..... I don't often think "I must have a drink", and I think it's true to say that at that time, a woman just didn't go into any old pub. [laughter] But my aunt was more or less a teetotaler, so I stopped at the pub, wiped my eyes [laughter] and had a stiff drink before going back to Aunt Mary. [laughter]

Q: Oh, good.

McBRIDE: Edward was desperately unhappy his first year at that school. I hadn't realized how unhappy he would be, because the school seemed nice. We had a close friend nearby, whose son had been at the school, and who was taking Edward out from time to time. But he was terribly unhappy; he obviously got more used to it as time went by, and after the first year, he was basically okay; but he didn't like it. On the other hand, without that school, he would never have gone to Eton, and that was an incredible experience.

Q: And that's the other thing. If the children hadn't done that We had children who stayed in Sierra Leone because their mothers wouldn't part with them. We had three of them. In Sierra Leone, they opened the school to the children of the noncommissioned officers. The officers, the Sierra Leonean officers, many of them had been educated in England.

McBRIDE: Oh, really.

Q: And then they opened the school to children who had never worn shoes or seen indoor plumbing, and they couldn't promise our children space. It wasn't as if just Ruth and Camillo went from the embassy. Everybody went, except these three children, whose mothers wouldn't part with them. Well, one mother never would; and her children were declared unbalanced, because they had no social interchange except with their mother. The other little boy, his mother realized, after a year of having chimpanzees and crews of tribal fishermen as playmates, that it was time for him to go to school. She didn't want to part with him because another son had been killed in an automobile accident, or something, so she wanted Kenny to stay with her. [Recorder turned off.]

McBRIDE: What were we talking about? Whether it was a good thing to have children in boarding school.

Q: And you felt there was an added complication of not being both American parents, and maybe you could elaborate on that.

McBRIDE: Since we were in Eastern Europe, and since I felt that the educational opportunities were better somewhere else and it didn't seem to make much sense to send the children back to the States - and in Edward's case anyway, he was too young - it was sensible to send them to boarding school in England. But I don't know, in retrospect, if that was the right thing, because since I'm English-born, and I didn't actually sound as English then as I do now . . .

Q: How did you change that?

McBRIDE: I think it was the London assignment. I didn't sound very American before that, but I didn't sound as English as I sound now! [laughter] But that meant, perhaps for our children, that there was a very strong non-American influence. Sarah, our oldest, fought against this and now feels very American. I think Edward can almost feel more American or more English, depending on what's going on at the time. But anyway, given the fact that they are American citizens, I think the foreign influence was too strong, and that was probably promoted by being in an English boarding school. But, of course, hindsight is

Q: Hindsight is always 20-20. [laughter]

McBRIDE: So, education of children is a problem for the foreign service.

Q: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I think jobs, education, and housing are the spouse issues, because we always had - it sounds like you did, too - we always had lovely places to live. We had big houses, and nice houses, and interesting houses. And now, even the DCM goes into a two- or three-bedroom apartment, apparently, if their children don't come to post. And by the time you're DCM, it's very likely that your children are in college. And what do you do with them when they come home? This is what I've heard.

McBRIDE: I imagine this is correct. USIS was, I think, probably slightly more flexible about housing arrangements than State. In both Madrid and London, we had to find our own housing, and only the PAO had a house that was always the PAO residence. Although there was a square footage regulation, in Madrid, Edward still counted as though he were living at home, even though he was in boarding school in England. We had to find our own apartment - I thought I'd go mad - I didn't really speak very good Spanish. We searched and searched and searched And this is the other thing: It's always the spouse that has to do the searching, because the actual employee is busy. . . . I will say that it does help you to get to know whatever city it happens to be very well. Anyway, we found a beautiful apartment, about the only apartment or house that we ever had, that I seriously would have loved to have owned permanently. But it took ages and ages to find it, and even when we did find it, it needed a lot of work.

Q: And this is Madrid.

McBRIDE: This is Madrid. And I don't know if we'd been in State that they would have agreed to do work on it. Perhaps so, because they came and did an awful lot for somebody else's house. Housing was a huge problem in Madrid. By the time we got to London, we also had to find our house. And I should know better than to let Ed find the house, when he was on TDY, or something in the U.K. Anyway, I was here in the States, so he found a house that he was very excited about. [laughter] It was a Georgian house. It probably exceeded the space allowance, but it was very inexpensive, so USIS allowed us to have it. It was the most impractical house you could possibly dream of. I hated the house partly because of the colors of the decoration, and it was a terrible house for entertaining: people came in on the first floor, where they left their coats. You then had to take them up to the sitting room floor, which was the second floor. Even if we were having only ten people to dinner, by the time the guests had all arrived, I was already exhausted. [laughter] I'd been up and down the stairs nine times, especially because the kitchen and dining room were in the basement.

So it was an impossible house for entertaining. But the house and I adjusted to one another. The house belonged to the then British ambassador to The Netherlands, who had sworn to us by all that was holy that he was going to get another ambassadorial assignment after The Netherlands, and therefore we could be in the house for four years. [laughter] Of course, that didn't happen. He announced that he wanted his house back, and we had to find another house.

This was a time when London house prices were soaring, needless to say, and in the meantime, the regulations had changed. When we went to London we weren't meant to take our furniture. I think that's right. And then, by the time we had to look for this new house, we were supposed to have our furniture. Anyway, again I searched and searched and searched, and Ed eventually went to hospital with severe diverticulitis. I think it was partly stress-induced by the house search. I found one or two houses I thought were okay, and he would say, no, no, you can see the kitchen from the dining room, and things that weren't frightfully important and normally wouldn't bother him. But I looked at seventy houses or apartments, and eventually, we found a house, which was brilliant for entertaining. It wasn't nearly as attractive or as historic but practical. But it exceeded the space regulations, because by this time, Edward was in college. However, Ed had been in hospital, and we'd looked, as I told you, at seventy houses [laughter], and so the admin counselor let us have the house. I had been acting housing officer for a certain amount of time in Madrid, and I think housing policy - I don't know how much it's changed - in Madrid was desperately bad when I was housing office, which was a couple of years after we'd arrived.

The Spanish wanted to rent to Americans, but regulations were impossible. In one case, I remember, the budget and fiscal officer, who was a single man, found this brilliant apartment that exceeded the space regulations, but which the landlady was prepared to let him have at a steal price; but he wasn't allowed to have it. We lost the lease. And it was frustrating to try to find people housing, and then, when you found them a house that they liked, not to be allowed to rent it for them because it exceeded the space regulations, even if it was in the fiscal allowance. I think it was totally ridiculous!

Q: It seems to me that you could have taken the space, taken the allotment, calculated that the allotment pays for this much space, and if you wanted to go over, you pay for that much yourself. Wouldn't they do that?

McBRIDE: They wouldn't do that.

Q: Oh, come on!

McBRIDE: I can't remember how it worked. When people were prepared to pay the difference, they weren't allowed to do so on the grounds that it would seem unfair, I think.

Q: I don't know how you would calculate the difference. You were only allowed so much space.

McBRIDE: No matter what.

Q: Yes. So they had to pay for that extra space, and then you had to assess the rent across the whole space, consider how much rent they owed for the space they were allotted, and then let them pay the difference.

McBRIDE: I quite agree. No, I don't know if they would have done that. I didn't even think of that, but I imagine that. . . . Oh, this was the other thing. If somebody signed a lease in Spain, you had, I think, a week or ten days, to renege on it. And the housing situation was such that if it were out there on the local market, which it often was (I would look through the newspaper ads each morning) then you had to say, yes, I want it immediately. But then you had, I think, a week or something in which to withdraw. In that week, somebody from GSO would have to go and measure the house - so you'd lost a day right there, even if they could go the next day - send the cable back to Washington, and Washington would then send a cable back saying " No, they can't have the house." Oh, they might say yes, depending on the space. But it often took more than a week, so we lost houses that way.

Q: But it was someone in Washington who had no idea how hard it was to get

McBRIDE: Well, they must have known, but anyway, yes, it was somebody in Washington. It was so frustrating and so stupid! Were they afraid of jealousy? I don't know. My understanding was - I'm not up-to-date on it - was that both in London and in Madrid, heads of sections, regardless of their family size, were entitled to special housing. . . . The regulations were waived. There was a PAO house in London and a PAO apartment in Madrid. But maybe it does apply to everybody from the DCM on down now.

Q: That was my understanding, but now, you know, it's been a long time since I have even been over to the State Department. I don't know what it is now.

McBRIDE: I don't know, but it wasn't as bad for the most senior officers beforehand.

Q: What did you do, mainly, as a CLO? What role did CLO fill at the post? Cultural? Mother confessor? All of the above?

Q: This is '86 to '90.

McBRIDE: Yes.

Q: Was that because of the personalities of the individuals, or was it because it's just a big city and a big embassy?

McBRIDE: It's a big city and a big embassy.

Q: And you're in Europe, and people can travel, and Spanish is fairly easy to conquer, I think, as a language. And they didn't need each other on a day-to-day basis, like you did in Senegal and we, in Freetown.

Q: Oh, but you plowed the profit back in. You didn't take it out.

McBRIDE: No, no, no! We plowed it back in, but that still meant I mean, we had a money box. But after several months. we had, I don't know, forty dollars, or something, in the money box.

Q: You were just recycling the money!

McBRIDE: Yes, well, anyway, we weren't allowed to do it. But that must have happened just as we were both leaving, so I really don't know what happened after that. [laughter]

Q: I remember something about the Marine. . . . Yes, I'll tell you what it was. We were doing something like that at the Marine house in Trinidad. We were selling goods at the Marine house, and someone locally, who had a bar, brought this to the attention of the authorities because we were underselling . . . You know, with duty-free alcohol we could undersell the bars. And there again, I forget what they did. Oh, they sent flyers around Port of Spain, saying that the Marines were illegally selling alcohol at their Friday night parties, and cutting into the business of the local bartenders.

McBRIDE: I don't think it was. It was something to do with U.S. regulations.

Q: Well, maybe we were violating U.S. regulations, and the Trinidadians picked up on it!
[laughter]

McBRIDE: Somehow, I thought the Marine house always could serve alcohol at parties, because that's the main way they make money for the Marine ball.

Q: But it was something like that, because the flyer was circulated in Port of Spain about these Americans destroying the bar industry in - I forget what our area was called. We were right near the embassy and right in town.

McBRIDE: Well, at least we didn't have the Spanish up in arms. Nobody was really up in arms about it, actually. I wish I could remember what finally happened. So, anyway, that was one thing we did. We were big advocates for employment. We dealt with a variety of people's problems. There was a lot of liaison. I feel that, as CLOs, we really shouldn't have been escorting VIPs, but this was the time that Spain was really building up both for the Olympics in Barcelona and for the World's Fair in Seville. So there were lots of American visitors we had to either take around ourselves or arrange to have taken around. I also spent a lot of time on education issues. There were a few problems at the American school, and so I was trying to tell people about other schools, and help. And then, it was also a medevac post.

Q: Oh, yes, we used to be medevaced from Rabat to Torrejon.

McBRIDE: And so I had to help people not I sometimes had to find them a place to stay. But some of the medevacs were amazingly demanding. For example if they had brought a small child with them, then I had to help arrange for the small child to have care while the mother was having the baby, if you see what I mean. I got left with lots of problems. There was lots of variety.

Q: Things that you really couldn't solve on your own! [laughter]

McBRIDE: It was a very busy job. One thing I found interesting about it was learning more of the inner workings of an embassy. But because morale had been so bad and people literally didn't meet one another, I was concentrating most on helping embassy spouses. I keep on saying "I," but my co-CLO should share any credit I got. She taught me a lot, and we worked together on everything.

Q: I had one situation, where a group - when I was CLO - when a group of boy scouts - and, you know, there were twenty, thirty of them - somehow the ambassador got them to the embassy. I'm not quite sure. It was a rainy day. They couldn't do what they were supposed to be doing that day because it was pouring. So, they were sitting around the embassy all day long. Well, the ambassador said, send them over to the snack bar! Well, I went right up to the admin officer and I said, look, I'm not paying to take care of those boy scouts all day long. There's no FLO allowance for that. And, I said, what are you going to do about it? Well, the ambassador was so tight. He died at the post, actually. But they were just saving everything, every penny that they could because he was retiring after that. He wasn't career; he was a political ambassador. And I don't know how the admin officer settled it. I don't know who paid for it. The admin officer probably found some He was very good at doing things that were just, just skirting the law! And he was very good about that. [laughter] And I don't know who took care of that, but that ambassador really just dumped those kids in my lap, with, oh, let the CLO pay for it.

McBRIDE: But CLO had no allowance.

Q: No! No! And I'm sure the ambassador knew that, but that didn't make any difference. The ambassador in Sierra Leone used to borrow Scotch, bourbon, what have you from our DCM all the time, and he never paid him back.

McBRIDE: Really?

Q: And the DCM was essentially subsidizing the ambassador's parties and things, because - and I'm not making this up - he borrowed liquor all the time from the DCM>

McBRIDE: How incredible!

Q: It was incredible. And after the DCM left, he borrowed from us a couple of times until the other DCM arrived. They didn't overlap. It was amazing! And I said, Guido, . . . [laughter] It was just amazing to me how people . . . whether they would change overseas, but sometimes their latent, real-person would surface in a stressful situation. It was a little stressful, living in a foreign language and a foreign culture.

McBRIDE: Yes, and I think it was stressful for people in Spain, because a lot of people hadn't had language training before they came.

Q: That's such a mistake. That is so shortsighted to cut back on language training funding.

McBRIDE: Yes. I presume that all the actual embassy foreign service officers and most of the support staff had had some language training, but that still meant . . . And it's actually the spouses, who are left at home. . .

Q: Need it the most.

McBRIDE: .Yes....who need it the most.

Q: Because Guido always had an interpreter if he really had a situation where he wanted to be on top of every word that was said.

McBRIDE: I used to shriek at Ed about the womb of the embassy [laughter] while I was left struggling at home. [laughter] But although the actual officer there must obviously, find the new job stressful, there's something reassuring about walking into an American embassy where, unless it's your first post, some things are always going to be the same.

Q: And that was exactly what they had that we didn't have, because we were dealing in a different currency, a different language, a different marketing system, a different staff. I used to be so envious of my host-country friends who'd had the same maid for thirty years, or even six years! [laughter] And the same person to take care of your children, because ours were just bounced from person to person.

Q: You can't, without offending them, because you're there.

McBRIDE: The reaction of many Americans would be, well, I'm a tax-paying American citizen [text obscured by laughter] Anyway, London was completely different with far less organizing of activities. The most important activity was a party in the fall for newcomers. We would get lots of different London organizations to come in and set up stalls, mainly with information that was useful for London. It was like a fair at which wine was served. I think it must have been donated. There was a raffle too. That was really the main semi-social thing I did as CLO in London. One honestly couldn't have pulled it all together without Gloria.

Q: I have to ask you one question. If you medevac somebody from London, where do you send them?

McBRIDE: They were all being sent to us.

Q: Oh, yes, yes. I probably misunderstood. But my first thought was, where do you send them from there? [laughter] And the education? Didn't they all go to the public schools? By public, I mean public in the British sense. No, they all went to American schools?

McBRIDE: Well, no. Most children off high school-age went to the American schools, but London has such a wealth of schools of all types But the other thing is that London is one of the places - and certainly the place that most people choose - where, if you have a special needs child particularly major learning or medical needs - London has schools that cater for such children, and, for example, very good programs for autistic children, and so on. So I who really knew very little about schools for children with special medical needs spent a great deal of time on that, probably because I had to learn all about it. But probably most new CLO's would have had to learn all about special schools etc.

Q: Oh, I think so.

McBRIDE: At the elementary and middle school levels, people didn't necessarily choose the American school. And anyway, there are about four or five American schools, just day schools, and then you've got boarding schools as well. So education was very time-consuming. But London I was furious when Ed announced we were going to London! [laughter] Absolutely furious! Because, I said "we've had children in school in England, and I know about London, so why are we going to London? You're in the foreign service to go to new places." But anyway, he wanted London, and I hadn't realized that the life I'd led - as a perfectly ordinary person living about thirty miles from London as a child, and as a young girl - was totally different from being at the embassy, because we attended events and met people whom I would never normally have met. The highlight social event was the diplomatic ball at Buckingham Palace. I couldn't believe I was there! Each Embassy was only allowed x number of people. I can't remember if the Americans had ten people. So you could only go in your last year, and you had to be pretty senior to be on the list to attend. So we were very lucky to go, and it was an amazing experience. The only trouble was that I felt that we could have just as well been there in Victoria's reign, or in the early 1900s, because so little had changed. Gloves reaching above the elbow. All kinds of protocol that had to be observed.

Q: Did you have to back away from the Queen, in high heels? [laughter]

McBRIDE: No, it's not like that. You stand in country groups in reception rooms. . . . Unfortunately, the ambassador was a fairly new arrival, so America was low in the order of precedence, which meant that we were about the ninetieth group she came to. . We must have stood there for, honestly, I think, an hour, all dressed up. I thought that was bad, because some quite elderly ambassadors and their wives were there, and they also had to stand for all that time. But after meeting the Queen, we all went off for a very delicious buffet-supper in one of the reception rooms. We had the run of the palace, which, of course, has fabulous portraits and things to look at. So we rather concentrated on that. But we were near the end of the supper anyway, because the first countries in the order of precedence got to go in right away, after meeting the Queen, Prince Philip, and Prince Charles and Prince Andrew. I can't remember who else was there, but several members of the royal family. Although you're introduced to the Queen, she's really concentrating on talking with the ambassador and the DCM. But it's still nice to have been able to curtsey and be really up close. Andrew talked to the group, but was quite charming and quite naive in that he said to one of us, "Oh, you must drop by sometime, [laughter] so that we can talk about this!" [laughter] Nobody had exchanged cards or anything. He didn't seem to realize that wasn't easy, but this was all a long time ago.

Q: How old was he then? He couldn't have been very old.

McBRIDE: Well, 1995. I haven't the foggiest idea how old he would have been.

Q: Thirteen years ago.

McBRIDE: Anyway, we got to go to Palace garden parties, to Ascot, to places like Glyndebourne. It was a whole different . . .

Q: Life style.

McBRIDE: And the other thing was that Ed had known London, in a sense, as an outsider, but he got to know it as somebody who lives in London. So now, we go back to London often, and as it happens, two of our children are there, one temporarily. And our grandchildren. So we go back and we feel very comfortable. And we have - I refer to them as "new" friends - we have friends now that we made when we were at the embassy in the '90s. We've been very lucky in our postings. But I have to go back to my initial notes from your questions. The issue of language we sort of touched on. Another issue for spouses is loneliness on arrival at post, especially large posts, which is why I think CLO is so important. But I hope that the CLO, in the end, especially at large posts, doesn't get drowned in paperwork and education and housing issues. I had to go to meetings of the housing committee. I had to go to meetings of the employment committee. That, plus individual contacts and reports and so on, make it far more difficult for the CLO to maintain a proper contact with each new arrival and make sure that they aren't lonely and that they are meeting other wives and so on and so forth.

Q: There's a book that Sally gave me, a little paperback called Diplomatic Baggage. Did you read it?

McBRIDE: I have a copy of it.

Q: Well, right at the beginning, when she arrives at that new post, that loneliness! You have nothing to do. You've left your family, maybe, and especially after your children no longer go with you. You arrive at post. You don't know anybody, the language. You don't know where anything is. Your husband goes off to the embassy. There you are with a staff that you don't know, you're trying to communicate with. And she captured it so perfectly in the first few paragraphs of that book. You almost don't have to read any further, because a lot is typical anecdotes. We all have the anecdotes from different countries, slightly different, but that loneliness when you first arrive! I had even in our next to last post, which was Recife! And after we had flown to Brasilia so that Guido could check in at the embassy, and then to fly up to the northeast. When you look at Brazil it's a big country, and it's a long way up to Recife and the consulate. And I got there and, you know, I'd been a foreign service wife for how many years now? And my feeling was, what am I doing here and what am I going to do here?

McBRIDE: How many other Americans were there?

Q: Let's see. We had It was mostly the business people. We had Alcoa. We had USIS. We had the Peace Corps when we arrived, but they eventually left. We had General Motors. We had the missionaries. I don't know. Did you have missionaries in Senegal? Southern Baptist missionaries? McBRIDE: We did. Missionaries always amaze me! And the ones in Senegal were especially fascinating . . . there were Mormon missionaries, too; and these poor kids would come . . . They didn't speak Wolof and they didn't speak French. So they had no way to convert anyone. And Senegal was pretty basic. You couldn't buy very much. So I would always invite them in to tea if I wasn't busy, and try and find why they were there at all! [laughter] But they were never much good at converting anybody. I don't think they even tried with me. I think I probably said, "well, why don't you have a cup of tea? Now, tell me who you are and why you are here!" [laughter] But we didn't have much contact with missionary families. We had a lot of contact with the Peace Corps.

Q: The Peace Corps was being phased out and AID was practically gone, and they were phasing out Guido really went out to save Recife, because they were phasing out a lot of consulates. And he was adamant that they weren't going to close it. Now Brazil is absolutely booming!

McBRIDE: So it's now a large consulate?

Q: Yes, and it's gorgeous. And companies have come back in. At the time you could see that it was the Brazil of tomorrow, but at the embassy they were very wound up in what was going on in Brasilia. We still had the generals, one of the generals. A lot of the bad things had stopped.

McBRIDE: But the embassy already was in Brasilia. When did it move? I've forgotten now. Was it the '60s?

Q: I don't know, '60s or '70s. Even when we were there, in the late '70s and '80s, the Brazilians would all evacuate Brasilia on Friday afternoon and go to Rio for the weekend. If you had a family in Brasilia, great camping. It was great for families, but for the single women it was something of a challenge. You know, it was an artificial city. As someone said, there were no dirty old corners. [laughter] So actually, being up in the northeast, we, and then the Hartleys, Doug and Sandra Hartley, were in Bahia; and we had pretty much the same situation. We really had the old Brazil, and really saw more of the way Brazil was in the northeast then, and had been, you know, in the past, in the northeast.

McBRIDE: So your other friends were in Salvador? In Bahia? How far away is this?

Q: Oh, well, we could drive it in day. I drove it once. But otherwise, we flew down. But we didn't go too often. No, but Doug had the consulate, and Guido had the consulate in Recife.

McBRIDE: Oh, really.

Q: And also, we had a house in town, in the neighborhood that was beginning to become commercial, and we had this gorgeous beach, Boa Viagem, but it was a good drive out to the beach. Everybody else in the consular corps lived out on the beach, practically, except us. And so I was constantly agitating to move. Well, Guide felt it was more important to save the consulate than to move us to the beach . . . He didn't like living in apartments anyway. You had to live in an apartment, almost, in Boa Viagem. And then, I found a house out there, and, as I've mentioned many times, they wouldn't let us have it. The DCM . . . well, we used to see him every Christmas, at a party, and it was all I could do to be civil to him! [laughter] Even now! [laughter] They were all looking out for themselves in Brasilia, you know. [laughter]

McBRIDE: Yes.

Q: The embassy said that the security was The house was by itself! Was by itself! And the one in town was the one that was a security problem, because someone could have dropped a bomb over the garden fence and sped away in a car. I think the problem was that not far away there was a high apartment building where someone could have gone up on the roof and picked me off in my garden. [laughter]

McBRIDE: Probably. Well, I suppose that they think of all these things far more carefully than I.

Q: I think so. DO any wives go along in the Middle East anymore? I don't think so.

McBRIDE: Oh, don't you think so?

Q: We have 700 unaccompanied positions, and a lot of them are in the Middle East.

McBRIDE: I don't know. I've never even asked about that. When we were visiting Syria last year, we met the American chargé d'affaires, I guess he's called, officially under the auspices of the Swiss. We met him and his wife, and he staggered me by saying his "staff of fifty American employees"! [laughter] And I wondered what in the world could fifty employees . . . !

Q: I think we're going to run out of tape. This will just about take us to the end, I think.

McBRIDE: Okay, well, I'll recount this traumatic experience or Sally will be cross
[laughter] We were on our way back to Dakar from home leave, so Charlotte was still in a carry basket, aged six months, and Sarah was in a pushchair, aged eighteen months. And the weather was very, very wet. We flew up from Savannah, and our landing was very delayed, as all the planes were backed up at JFK. When we landed, we needed to go to the Pan Am terminal to leave all our bags, but we had flown in on National Airlines, I think. Because of the backup and the weather, there were no limos. Eventually, an Alitalia limousine pulled up, and the driver presumably saw this forlorn little group with small children and lots of luggage. And so he said, "I'll take you to the Pan Am terminal!" He put all the luggage in the back, and Charlotte was in the carry basket on the backseat, and Ed and Sarah and I were on the next seat. We got to the newly built Pan Am terminal, which was chaos, and so he couldn't pull up under the entrance awning because of the taxi lines because of the rain. Anyway, Ed told me to run on in with Sarah. So I get Sarah into the pushchair and run on under the awning, watching. Ed gets out all the luggage, and slams down the door at the back. The driver forgets about Charlotte on the back seat, accelerates because he was in an illegal stopping point, [laughter], and drives away. [laughter] Well, I was furious.

Q: You weren't there, though, were you?

Q: Weren't you frantic?

McBRIDE: I was frantic at first, but when things really are bad, something shuts down inside me, and I literally tune out! [laughter] So, having vented my spleen, as they say [laughter]

Q: The best thing to do, really, because there's no point in getting hysterical.

McBRIDE: Well, I was hysterical, briefly, but then all you could really do was wait. I probably would have got hysterical if we'd waited, let's say, three hours.

Q: And you were getting ready to board the plane.

McBRIDE: Well, no we weren't, which was good. The whole reason we had to leave our luggage at the terminal was that we were spending the night with a cousin, just outside New York. But once we got Charlotte back, it turned out to be a funny story. [laughter]

Q: Well, I think that's a good note to end on.

End of interview